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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000100

SIPDIS

STATE PASS TO DHS FOR DAVID TIEDGE AND CLINT LAMM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/03/2019

TAGS: [EAIR](#) [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EI](#)

SUBJECT: U.S.-IRISH PRE-CLEARANCE AGREEMENT: STILL WORK TO DO

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Classified By: CDA Robert J. Faucher. Reasons 1.4(b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In November 2008, former Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff and Irish Transport Minister Noel Dempsey signed an Agreement on Air Transport Preclearance ("Agreement"). Building on the 1985 immigration preinspection agreement, the Agreement allows for customs, immigration and agricultural inspections at Dublin and Shannon airports, the only such operations in Europe. Not only will these operations enhance U.S. border security but they have the potential to provide a substantial economic boost to both airports, particularly Shannon. For the Irish government, this agreement is important for the positive signal it sends about both its relationship with the U.S. and its commitment to improving the flagging Irish economy. Ensuring that full pre-clearance operations begin in Shannon in July 2009 and in Dublin in 2010 is a priority for the Irish government and Post. End Summary.

Shannon Airport

¶2. (C) For the Irish government, the Agreement reaffirms the strong bilateral ties between the U.S. and Ireland, and more importantly, will give an economic boost to the Shannon region once implemented. Shannon airport is located in one of the areas of Ireland hardest-hit by the current economic downturn. The Shannon Airport Authority (SAA) is working closely with the U.S. to ensure that a new Customs and Border Protection (CBP) facility is built on time. The facility is scheduled to open on July 1, 2009.

¶3. (C) SAA officials believe that full pre-clearance operations will improve the airport's business fortunes. Passenger numbers have been falling at Shannon over the last several years. Shannon's location in the west of Ireland) with plenty of land available for commercial expansion adjacent to the airport - makes it an ideal spot not only for commercial aviation operations but also as an entry point to the United States for general aviation (GA) flights. (Note: GA flights are private, non-regularly-scheduled flights, usually on smaller aircraft. End note.) CBP's plans for Shannon include the screening of general aviation flights, as anticipated in the Agreement. SAA hopes to have the screening of cargo flights included in the Agreement at a later date. SAA is already marketing Shannon airport preclearance operations as a unique hub for European and Middle Eastern flights to the United States.

¶4. (C) Senior Irish government officials, including Transportation Minister Dempsey, repeatedly highlight the importance of implementing the Agreement. Irish Defense Minister O'Dea is responsible for the Shannon area constituency and has repeatedly stressed to the Embassy that

preclearance operations should be launched as soon as possible. As an indication of how important this project is to Ireland, an Irish Department of Transport official told Econoff that there is a "good chance" that Prime Minister Cowen will attend the opening ceremony in Shannon. Post recommends that a senior USG official attend the opening ceremony.

Dublin Airport

¶15. (C) The CBP facility at the Dublin airport will be housed in the second terminal (T2), which is currently under construction and slated for a mid-2010 opening. Until the economic downturn, Dublin airport's passenger numbers had been growing steadily, prompting the need for the second terminal. The airport is not big enough to comfortably accommodate the passenger traffic. Because of this strong growth in passenger numbers, the Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) is in a relatively stronger economic position than Shannon airport. Therefore, while welcoming the implementation of the Agreement, the DAA is not depending on it to improve its economic health. No preclearance of general aviation or cargo flights is foreseen for Dublin Airport.

Current CBP Operations

¶16. (C) Since signing the 1985 preinspection agreement, Ireland has allowed immigration preinspection at both Shannon and Dublin airports. Currently all six Shannon flights to the U.S. are preinspected by CBP officials, processing up to approximately 1,500 passengers per day. At Dublin airport, only 7 of 14 U.S. flights are preinspected, processing

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approximately 1,918 passengers daily.

¶17. (C) DAA and airline officials regularly press CBP to include all US-destined flights in the current preinspection program, as implicitly promised in the 1985 preinspection agreement. Space constraints at Dublin airport's CBP facilities and lack of staff limit CBP's ability to handle all the passengers heading to the U.S. CBP estimates that the addition of up to five more CBP officers at Dublin would enable at least three more flights to be preinspected. Until CBP moves into its new facility, however, it will not be able to accommodate all passengers heading to the U.S.

Other Issues

¶18. (C) Before operations can commence at either airport, the U.S. and Irish governments must resolve (or be close to resolving) several operational issues. The most contentious has been setting up a baggage retrieval system at Dublin airport that the air carriers, CBP, and the DAA can agree to. These parties have met twice in Dublin and are close to agreement on a system that will minimize the expected costs to the carriers from retrieving bags that CBP requests to inspect more fully. Other issues include: establishing protocols for handling identified radioactive or nuclear material, the type of access control systems for the CBP area at both airports, the possibility of on-board duty-free sales post-clearance, and the protocol for sharing of advance passenger information for private aircraft.

Comment and Recommendations

¶19. (C) It is unlikely that Irish operational issues will delay the commencement of full preclearance operations at Shannon or Dublin airports. However, as the State Department has discussed with DHS, the status of 13 INS-legacy, locally-resident American CBP employees must be resolved

before Post can allow an increase in the number of CBP personnel serving in Ireland. Without an increase in personnel, preclearance operations will not be feasible at either Shannon or Dublin airports. Both Post and DHS officials have repeatedly assured the Irish government that CBP will provide the necessary human resources to begin operations on time. Given the importance of this agreement to U.S. counterterrorism efforts and to the Irish government, failure to meet this commitment would be damaging to USG interests. We recommend that Washington agencies find a way to solve this issue immediately.

¶10. (C) In the meantime, CBP should consider increasing the number of personnel assigned to Dublin airport to permit preinspection of the maximum possible number of flights to the U.S. Increasing opportunities for airline participation in preinspection operations at Dublin signals a U.S. commitment to full implementation of the preinspection agreement. It would also pre-position some of the many new CBP personnel who will be required for Dublin airport preclearance operations, reinforcing the U.S. readiness to launch the Agreement strongly and without hesitation.

FAUCHER